

Georgia Bureau of Investigation

News Release

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“Operation Southern Impact” Targets Those Who Exploit Children by Using the Internet

Decatur, GA – A total of 31 people were arrested during a mutually coordinated operation between Georgia and Alabama law enforcement agencies. *Operation Southern Impact* targeted persons who sexually exploit children by using the Internet. In Georgia, 21 people have been arrested during *Operation Southern Impact*. Those arrested in Georgia were charged with crimes pursuant to O.C.G.A. 16-12-100.2, Computer Pornography and Child Exploitation Prevention Act of 2007. Additional charges may be forthcoming and other arrests may occur after analysis of seized digital devices.

The joint, proactive investigation was coordinated by the Georgia Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (GA ICAC TF) and the Alabama Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (AL ICAC TF) and focused on those who possess and distribute child pornography and those who are sexually exploiting children in other ways using the internet. The planning for *Operation Southern Impact* began approximately 3 months ago and culminated in 2 days of search warrant executions and arrests in Georgia and Alabama.

The Georgia Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and the Alabama Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force wanted to reinforce to those who exploit children that the ICAC Task Forces will work together to make an impact in their respective states and the region as a whole. The cooperation among agencies and among states illustrates their level of commitment to detect, arrest, and prosecute child predators. Cooperation is always important in law enforcement, but it is never more important than when we set out to protect children. *Operation Southern Impact* has given us an opportunity to share our experience, information, and resources across units, agencies, and state lines, to make sure that there is no safe place to hide for criminals who would victimize the most vulnerable among us.

A total of 54 search warrants were executed in Georgia and Alabama. Law enforcement officers conducting the searches were looking for evidence of possession and distribution of child pornography using the internet as well as evidence of other child exploitation related crimes. Over the course of the operation, 162 digital devices were examined and 731 digital media and devices were seized as evidence in Georgia and Alabama.

In Georgia, the operation was a coordinated effort between the following federal, state, and local criminal justice agencies:

Barrow County Sheriff's Office
Bryan County Sheriff's Office
Cherokee County Sheriff's Office
Cobb County Police Department
Coffee County Sheriff's Office
Columbia County Sheriff's Office
Columbus Police Department
Cornelia Police Department
Coweta County Sheriff's Office
DeKalb County Police Department
Douglas County Sheriff's Office
Duluth Police Department
Effingham County Sheriff's Office
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Forsyth County Sheriff's Office
Gwinnett County Police Department
Habersham County Sheriff's Office
Hall County Sheriff's Office
Henry County Police Department
Homeland Security Investigations
Houston County Sheriff's Office
Jackson County Sheriff's Office
Liberty County Sheriff's Office
Lowndes County Sheriff's Office
Meriwether County Sheriff's Office
Newton County Sheriff's Office
Oglethorpe County Sheriff's Office
Paulding County Sheriff's Office
Pooler Police Department
Richmond Hill Police Department
Roswell Police Department
Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department
Smyrna Police Department
United States Secret Service

The arrestees, ranged in age from 22 to 73. Some of their occupations included students, engineer, small business owner, store clerk, mechanic and military cybersecurity personnel. Those in custody and charged in Georgia as part of *Operation Southern Impact* are:

1. David Potts, W/M, Cumming, GA, 61 years of age, retired
2. Tyler Quarles, W/M, Winterville, GA, 24 years of age, store clerk
3. Parker Hoekstra, W/M, Smyrna, GA, 22 years of age, student

4. Robert Peters, W/M, Winston, GA, 73 years of age, retired
5. Kenneth Flowers, W/M, Dallas, GA, 54 years of age, engineer/small business owner
6. Corey Moore, B/M, Savannah, GA, 38 years of age, unemployed
7. Ray Powers III, W/M, Warner Robbins, 27 years of age, manufacturing employee
8. Russell Love, Jr., W/M, Swainsboro, GA, 48 years of age, unemployed
9. Kevin Tanner, W/M, Kite, GA, 40 years of age, production line worker
10. Dwight Watson, W/M, Canton, GA, 43 years of age, addiction counseling pastor
11. Jonathan Hurwitz, W/M, Evans, GA, 48 years of age, military cybersecurity personnel
12. Benjamin Brinker, W/M, Lawrenceville, GA, 30 years of age, construction
13. Daniel Ridley, W/M, Cornelia, GA, 34 years of age, fencing company employee
14. Kerry Williams, W/M, Columbus, GA, 56 years of age, mechanic
15. Roger McDonald, W/M, Valdosta, GA, 61 years of age, Registered Nurse
16. Shane Murphy, W/M, Winder, GA, 37 years of age, unemployed
17. Jason Herrin, W/M, of Douglasville, GA, 27 years of age, restaurant employee
18. Erik Nateras, H/M, of Atlanta, GA, 27 years of age, unknown

The Georgia ICAC Task Force is comprised of 210+ local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, other related criminal justice agencies and prosecutor's offices. The mission of the ICAC Task Force, created by the U. S. Department of Justice and managed and operated by the GBI in Georgia, is to assist state and local law enforcement agencies in developing an effective response to cyber enticement and child pornography cases. This support encompasses forensic and investigative components, training and technical assistance, victim services, prevention and community education. The ICAC Program was developed in response to the increasing number of children and teenagers using the internet, the proliferation of child pornography, and the heightened online activity by predators searching for unsupervised contact with underage victims. By helping state and local law enforcement agencies develop effective and sustainable responses to online child victimization and child pornography, the ICAC program delivers national resources at the local level.

The Georgia ICAC Task Force made 244 arrests in 2015. The GA ICAC TF received almost 3,000 tips from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in 2015 and worked 3,872 investigations related to child exploitation. The GA ICAC TF also conducted 391 Internet safety presentations.

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